

Torrington, CT

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to budgetary cuts to cut funding to the Parent Trust Fund

Thank you for permitting me to submit this testimony.

I am a wife and mother of three school-aged children. All of my children were adopted in Florida. Our son was a private, at-birth placement and our daughter's were adopted through the State of FL DCF. They were originally our nieces; their adoption followed a fatal domestic violence incident.

We understood our daughter's would likely need specialized therapy and services to help them heal and over come the effects of their early life exposures. We engaged what we could in Florida. Once in CT, we took additional steps to pursue such services, including reaching out to a state agency for assistance in accessing a higher level of care for our youngest daughter. This action was clinician recommended and deem necessary and appropriate to meet her needs.

Due to the complexity of her conditions i.e. PTSD, Depression, Reactive Attachment /Complex Trauma Disorder, caring for her can be challenging and sometimes dangerous. When she was 7 years old, her behaviors and emotional instabilities became violent and unsafe. We did the responsible thing by seeking answers and access, but my family was denied access, accused of wrong doing, processed as neglectful/ abusive parents, and our troubled daughter was involuntarily removed from our care. The system that intervened utilized flawed and misguided policies and practices. As a result, my family was harmed and

our disturbed daughter's conditions were ignored and compounded.

During this time I sought out legislator assistance. Through those exchanges, I learned of the Parent Leadership Training Institute program. I met PLTI alumni by attending forums and networking with policy makers and advocate family members. I did all this as a preamble to action, as I knew I needed to examine how the system I was sucked into could have failed us. If it failed us, healthy, nurturing, competent parents seeking appropriate care options through supplemental government funding programs; it must be failing others all the time. I knew I had to do something, but I was unclear where to start.

It was the Parent Leadership Training program, through the Commissioner on Children's office, that gave me the direction, confidence and policy making procedural framework to begin down a journey to make change. I learned about civic practices and met strategic legislators. All of these opportunities, facilitated by the program, gave me confidence and comfort in reaching out to lawmakers on specific issues. I experienced the Legislative Office Building, sat in the seat I would need to be familiar with to be effective, and toured the Capitol Building with my class. I gained a sense of belonging within a group of others interested in making change and felt ready to take the leap into civic leadership through advocacy.

I am asking that the Parent Trust Fund funding be maintained at its current level, or increased. It sustained a cut last session, which has already brought about a reduction in the number of trainings it can offer and the number of eager advocates in

training it can groom. That means, fewer voices will raise from the ashes of the unforeseen circumstances of well-meaning legislation to be heard above the noise of fiscal discourse.

If not for the Parent Trust Fund and the training provided me through parent leader training, I would not be providing you this testimony today. I would not be sitting on multiple state agency and program committees, regional coalitions and system review panels. I wouldn't be organizing a team of parents around specific policy issues and I wouldn't be reaching out to those in need of an advocate. It is the Parent Trust Fund, and its funding of the Parent Leadership Training Institute, that brought me here. The tools I gained from the experience of participation are priceless to me, and should be viewed as valuable and worth preserving by this Committee.

Thank you.

Maureen A. O'Neill - Davis
Advocate, Freelance Grant Writer